

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06
SSM-03 IO-13 MCT-01 /074 W
-----112808 011849Z /43

R 010540Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6708
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
SECDEF
DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 0662

E.O. 11652:MOGDS-1
TAGS: PMZ, PGOV, SY, IQ
SUBJECT: HIATUS IN ANTI-REGIME TERRORISM LENDS CREDIBILITY TO
IRAQI CONNECTION

1. FOR SEVERAL YEARS THE ASSAD REGIME HAS BEEN PLAGUED BY
SPORADIC TERRORIST ACTS DIRECTED AGAINST SOME OF ITS
INSTITUTIONS AND KEY SUPPORTERS -- ESPECIALLY PROMINENT ALAWITES.
ALMOST INVARIABLY THE REGIME, WHEN ADMITTING TO SUCH INCIDENTS
HAS VOLUBLY AND AGKILY ACCUSED IRAQ OF PERPETRATING THESE
ACTS. SOMETIMES SUCH ACCUSATIONS APPEARED TO HAVE SOME
BASIS IN FACT, BUT MANY GENERALLY WELL-INFORMED SYRIANS
SUSPECTED THAT THESE ACTS WERE COMMITTED BY A PATCHWORK
OF ANTI-REGIME SYRIANS OR, SOMETIMES, SPRANG FROM INTRA-
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REGIME FEUDING.

2. OVER THREE MONTHS HAVE NOW ELAPSED SINCE A MAJOR
TERRORIST ACT INSIDE SYRIA WAS COMMITTED--A PERIOD WHICH
ALMOST COINCIDES WITH SADAT'S ANNOUNCEMENT THA HE WOULD
GO TO JERUSALEM AND SUBSEQUENT EFFORTS TO RECONCILE IRAQ
AND SYRIA. WE BELIEVE IT IS NOT COINCIDENTAL.

THE FEBRUARY 8 REFERENDUM WHICH WILL "LEGITIMIZE" ASSAD'S RULE FOR ANOTHER SEVEN-YEAR TERM WOULD APPEAR TO BE A PROPITIOUS TIME FOR ANTI-REGIME OPPONENTS IF SUFFICIENTLY WELL ORGANIZED AND ARMED, TO EMBARRASS THE REGIME. YET, TO DATE NO SUCH ACTS HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT. THIS EVIDENCE, WHILE CIRCUMSTANTIAL, TENDS TO SUPPORT THE REGIME'S CONTENTION THAT IRAQ HAS PLAYED A MAJOR ROLE IN FOMENTING MUCH OF THE ANTI-REGIME ACTIVITY. NOR IS THIS AN ISOLATED CASE. IN LATE SUMMER OF 1977 DURING ANOTHER HIATUS WE REPEATEDLY HEARD REPORTS THAT VARIOUS PARTIES WERE ATTEMPTING TO MEDIATE THE SYRO-IRAQI QUARREL.

3. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT EVERY INCIDENT WHICH HAS OCCURRED OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS WAS IRAQI-INSPIRED. FOR EXAMPLE, IT IS PROBABLE THAT THE BOMBINGS OF DAMASCUS NEWSPAPER OFFICES IN OCTOBER 1977 RESULTED FROM TENSION WITHIN ASSAD'S INNER CIRCLE OVER THE ZEALOTRY WITH WHICH THE PRESS WAS PROMOTING THE ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN. NEVERTHELESS, IT IS LIKELY THAT MOST GROUPS WISHING TO ACT AGAINST THE REGIME SEEK OUT THEIRAQIS OR VICE VEGA. FOR INSTANCE, IN LATE 1976 SOME MEMBERS OF HAMA'S YOUTH OF MUHAMMAD, AN OFFSHOOT OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD, WERE CONVICTED OF KILLING SEVERAL SECURITY OFFICIALS FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF THEIR LEADER MARWAN HADID (ALLEGEDLY FROM A HUNGER STRIKE) WHILE INCARCERATED. THE ASSAD REGIME CLAIMED THAT THEY HAD BEEN CONFIDENTIAL

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WORKING FOR THE IRAQIS. THE TRUTH PROBABLY LIES SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN.

4. WHILE UNCOUBTEDLY THERE EXIST ANTI-REGIME SYRIANS SUFFICIENTLY COMMITTED TO UNDERTAKE ACTS FOR WHICH THEY KNOW THEY MAY BE TORTURED AND HUNG IF CAUGHT; SUCH INDIVIDUALS REQUIRE WEAPONS, EXPLOSIVES, SOPHISTICATED INTELLIGENCE, AND PLANNING AMONG OTHER THINGS IF THEY ARE TO SUCCEED. GIVEN THE PERVASIVE NATURE OF THE SYRIAN SECURITY APPARATUS, IT IS DIFFICULT FOR ANY GROUP TO MOUNT EFFECTIVE ANTI-REGIME OPERATIONS WITHOUT EITHER THE SUPPORT OF KEY FIGURES WITHIN THE SECURITY APPARATUS OR SUPPORT FROM A COUNTRY OR OUTSIDE ORGANIZATION OPPOSED TO THE ASSAD REGIME. MOST OF THOSE CAUGHT AND HUNG FOR THESE INCIDENTS HAVE BEEN SYRIANS ACCUSED OF COLLUDING WITH IRAQ. RUMORS ARE NOW CIRCULATING THAT O/A JAN 8 SOME INDIVIDUALS WERE HUNG HERE FOR TERRORIST ACTS COMMITTED IN THE FALL OF 1977. PREVIOUS PRACTICE HAS BEEN TO ANNOUNCE THE EXECUTIONS AND TO MOUNT AN ANTI-IRAQI PRESS CAMPAIGN IMMEDIATELY AFTERWARDS. IF THE RUMORS ARE TRUE THE ABSENCE OF ANY ANNOUNCEMENT SUGGESTS ASSAD WISHED TO AVOID UPSETTING SENSITIVE MEDIATION EFFORTS.

5. FORMEXQY, WE SHARED THE SKEPTICISM OF MANY SYRIANS
THAT MOST TERRORIST ACTS WERE INSTIGATED FROM OUTSIDE THE
COUNTRY. HOWEVER, THE ABSENCE OF SUCH INCIDENTS ON TWO SEPARATE
OCCASIONS DURING MEDIATION EFFORTS AIMED AT RESOLVING THE SYRO-
IRAQI
DISPUTE LENDS CREDIBILITY TO SYRIA'S ALLEGATIONS. WHILE SOLID
PROOF IS LACKING, WE NOW BELIEVE THAT MANY ANTI-REGIME GROUPS EVEN
WHEN ACTING ON THEIR OWN
VOLITION DEPEND UPON IRAQ FOR SUBSTANTIAL SUPPORT AND IN OTHER
CASES THAT IRAQ ACTIVELY RECRUITS SYRIANS FOR TERRORISTS
ACTIVITIES. IF OUR SPECULATION IS CORRECT, ONE OF THE PRIME
BENEFITS TO THE ASSAD REGIME FROM ANY SYRO-IRAQI RAPPROCHEMENT
SHOULD BE A MARKED DIMINUTION IN EFFECTIVE ANTI-REGIME ACTIVITY.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: TERRORISTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 01 feb 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978DAMASC00662
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780048-0731
Format: TEL
From: DAMASCUS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t197802108/aaaadmzp.tel
Line Count: 137
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 327508ce-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 02 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3446179
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: HIATUS IN ANTI-REGIME TERRORISM LENDS CREDIBILITY TO IRAQI CONNECTION
TAGS: PGOV, PINS, SY, IZ
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/327508ce-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014